
2000 WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND SAFETY REPORT



**CITY OF SEATTLE
PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT**

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OVERVIEW



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Five Year Summary

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Workers' Compensation Claims	1,822	1,641	1,687	1,628	1,594
Frequency Rate (per 100 FTE)	19.5	17.4	16.7	15.9	15.1
Severity Rate (Days lost per 100 FTE)	318	323	279	251.5	285
Percent of Claims that are Time Loss	36.4%	35.8%	36.9%	37%	38.8%
Most Common Cause of Injury Lifting	219	160	152	158	137
Most Common Nature of Injury Sprain/Strain	876	740	778	638	547
Most Frequently injured Body Area-Back	341	281	254	284	253
Average Incurred Cost Per Claim	\$4,409	\$4,516	\$4,478	\$4,527	\$6,202
Total Dollars Incurred (paid plus reserves for future costs)	\$8,034,005	\$7,410,733	\$7,533,928	\$7,370,533	\$9,886,276

Significant Developments in 2000

Claims Developments

❖ Frequency Rate

For the fourth consecutive year, the City's Frequency Rate declined. **The 2000 rate of 15.1 is the lowest in 12 years.**

❖ Claims Severity Rate

The City's overall Severity Rate rose for the first time in three years. It increased from 251.5 days lost per 100 full time workers in 1999 to 285 in 2000. In general, those departments whose percentage of time loss claims increased in 1999 saw the reflection of those longer lasting claims in their higher severity rate for 2000.

❖ Time Loss Claims

Time loss claims are those injuries which occurred in 2000 and resulted in more than 3 lost days from work. The overall percentage of time loss claims citywide again rose by a small amount. Of the large departments, ESD had the most significant decrease - 10%. SEATRAN, City Light and Parks all had increases of over 4%.



❖ **Cause, Nature and Location**

Falls and **lifting** have vied for the top “cause” of injury among City employees for the past seven years. This trend is similar to national statistics. **Struck by** and **Struck against** both involved contact with materials and are both usually in the top five causes. Injuries from **Vehicle Accidents** increased dramatically from 1992 (13) to 1995 (84) and have remained one of the top six injury causes for five of the past six years. Police, SeaTran and Parks accounted for the top three highest total costs, followed by TES and Fire.

The cost of **Explosion** injuries increased dramatically because of three City Light employees seriously injured in an explosion. In 2000, three of the new injury codes added in 1999 (**shoveling**, **computer use**, and **jarring/bouncing**) ranked in the top ten highest average costs even though they were low in actual number of claims. Fortunately, many of the most costly injuries seldom occur.

Pain as a diagnosis increased 130% in 2000. There is an increasing trend for the medical community to use and accept **pain** as a diagnosis rather than as just a symptom. In 2000, 177 of the City's 1594 injury claims were coded as **pain** using either the physician's diagnosis or the patient's description.

Significant Facts about Injured Workers

❖ **Multiple claims**

We measure the past two year period every year, and for the past six years, the numbers have been fairly stable. However, during the past two year period, there has been a small change for the better. The percent and cost of injury claims from employees having three or more injuries has decreased. However, the total dollar incurred by employees with two or more claims in a two year period, rose 14%, from \$5,857,709 in 1999-2000.

❖ **Length of Service**

Employees with 5 to 9 years of service have a larger proportion of total claims than their proportion to the total workforce. In contrast, employees with 21 to 25 years of service have significantly fewer claims than their proportion of the work force.

❖ **Ergonomic Injuries**

To define work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) in the City, we have selected City “cause” and “nature” injury codes to match the WISHA definition of WMSD. In 2000 the City workforce had 558 WMSDs representing 35% of the injury claims, an estimated \$3.5 million cost for those injuries and more than 44% of the total injury claims costs. In 2001 and 2002, the City will be implementing an Ergonomic Accountability Program, that will identify which WMSDs were specifically related to ergonomic risk factors as identified in the new regulations. By July 1, 2003, the City must evaluate all work areas to identify caution zone jobs and ergonomic job hazards, reduce the hazards if possible, and provide training to employees and supervisors.



Program Initiatives, Results and Issues in 2000

I. Ergonomic Injuries and the Ergonomic Accountability Program

In May 2000, the Washington State Legislature passed ergonomic regulations (WAC 296-62-051), the purpose of which is to reduce employee exposure to specific hazards that can cause or aggravate work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD).

WMSD's include disorders such as work-related back strain, tendonitis, and carpal tunnel syndrome. *The goal of the regulation is to reduce the ergonomic risk factors in order to reduce the related injuries.*

For the accountability program, Departments will set targets to reduce ergonomic injuries by identifying and reducing ergonomic risk factors. If an MSD has no ergonomic risk factors, that injury claim will not be counted as an ergonomic injury. In future reports, injury data will be provided for departments to compare the ergonomic risk factors with their injuries, and evaluate their success in reducing risks.

❖ Injury Prevention and Safety

The Citywide Safety Unit identifies citywide safety needs and develops citywide policy guidelines. They also manage several programs centrally, however, they work closely with department safety staff to insure successful program implementation.

❖ Employment Medical Examinations

The City has two types of exams, preplacement medical exams, and medical monitoring exams. Both identify health problems that could interfere with job duties or identify when employees can work or return to work. These exams help ensure safe workers by identifying problems early so treatment is more effective, and by protecting employees from job hazards.

- In 2000, 876 **preplacement medical exams** were conducted, and of those, 858 were medically qualified. Seven job candidates were medically disqualified and 11 candidates had job limitations.
- In 2000, 1126 total **medical monitoring exams** were conducted. Four were disqualified (three for asbestos exams and one for scuba diving) and were temporarily limited from performing the full range of their job. Of the 1126 exams, 950 were examined for their ability to wear a respirator, and of those, 948 were qualified to wear a respirator without limitation; two were medically disqualified.
- In 2000, 3,797 audiograms were performed on city employees as part of the city's Hearing Conservation Program.

❖ Management of Department of Transportation (DOT) Drug Testing Program

The City Safety Unit has managed the DOT Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and Coast Guard (CG) Drug Testing Program, which has identified 58 City employees using drugs in the last five years. The only **employee who failed a drug test in 2000 was a newly appointed City employee with two days on the job, who tested positive for drugs in a DOT required preduty test.** This extremely low rate demonstrates the deterrent effect of drug testing on the 850 employees, which comprise 7% of the City



employee population. The positive rate steadily decreased to near zero over the past five years.

❖ **Preemployment Drug Testing**

The Citywide Safety Unit implemented this program in July 1996 to screen out job candidates whose illegal drug use increased their likelihood of causing injuries to themselves or others. In the first nine months of 2000, this program screened out 73 substance abusers who would otherwise have been hired. Over the 4 ½ years of the program, 304 candidates who failed the drug test were disqualified from city employment for one year. Despite the visibility of the program, the City's drug test failure rate increased from 4.6% of candidates to 7%.

In September 1997, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a civil lawsuit against the City, alleging the City of Seattle's program of requiring urine drug tests of job candidates violated state constitution. However, in January 1999, the Superior Court granted the City's motion for summary judgement. The ACLU appealed. In October 2000, the Washington State Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the City of Seattle to cease its' preemployment drug testing program except for public safety sensitive jobs. And remanded the case back to Superior Court.

❖ **Fit for Duty (FFD) Medical Examination Consultation and Training**

Through out the city, at least five FFD exams were conducted where department staff requested City Safety assistance. In all five cases the examining physicians ordered either alcohol or drug and alcohol tests. One case tested negative for drugs or alcohol, and in another case the employee was found to have medical condition. In the other three cases the employees tested positive for drugs. It is possible that some exams were done without City Safety's involvement because the information and forms for the exam are on the City Safety inweb, and hundreds of supervisors have been trained in the last several years. In 2000, the City Safety Unit provided training for 35 supervisors and managers.

❖ **Reports and Communication**

The Safety and Workers' Compensation Units provided monthly, mid-year, and annual reports of injury data in 2000 and the City Safety Unit produced quarterly *Employee Safety Newsletters*. The newsletters provided a means to give employees safety, health, and injury report information.

❖ **Safety Accountability Program**

In mid 1999, the City Safety Officers discussed "safety accountability", using a model developed by Stan Freeman, then Professor at the University of Washington. The model includes:

- setting target goals,
- reporting injuries & accidents by directors and manager's names, and
- evaluating directors & managers on meeting their target goals.

Galen Mauden, ESD Senior Safety & Health Specialist, agreed to pilot the model in ESD's Fleets, Facilities, and Animal Control divisions. After one year, the accountability project has produced results. Two of the divisions are seeing great improvement by holding the managers accountable. Facilities accomplished their goal



of reducing their injury frequency rate by 10%. Fleets reduced their frequency rate by 27 percent. The Fleets and Facilities Department plans to expand the project to other work units. ESD (which included Fleets and Facilities as divisions) was the only department that has improved all four indicators: total claims, injury frequency rate, average cost per claim, and percent of time loss claims. Although we cannot directly attribute the improvement to accountability, it may have been a positive contributing factor. The project may continue with Animal Control even though they are now a part of the Finance Department. The longer term goal is to see other departments implement this accountability approach.

II. Budget Accountability

Departments are provided a budget for their estimated workers' compensation expenses and are billed for direct medical costs associated with on-the-job injuries. This reimburses the central Workers' Compensation Fund, which initially makes the payments. The department's salary budget must cover time loss (salary) charges for regular employees. Additionally, salary cost for any replacement workers must also be paid by that department. These costs are not reported here.

There was a large disparity in how departments performed. Of the large departments, City Light, ESD, Parks, Police and Seattle Center were all well within their budgets. Fire, SEATRAN, and SPU were all over budget. Since the payments being made are mandated by state law and City ordinance, departments do not necessarily have control over what will be spent and can best control costs by preventing accidents.

III. Claims Management/ Initiatives

For the fourth straight year the total number of open claims has decreased, as has the average caseload per analyst. While total claims costs rose, the proportion of discretionary costs to total claims costs remained stable. Subrogation and excess insurance recoveries were down due to a staff vacancy. Customer service rankings from departments increased. Individual surveys to injured workers following claim closure also showed high satisfaction with the level of customer service.

	1997	1998	1999	2000
Number of Open Claims	1662	1575	1447	1296
Average Caseload per Analyst	192	139	133	114
Total Payments	\$9,687,706	\$7,594,359	\$7,734,622	\$9,491,938
Discretionary Claim Costs (Vocational, Consulting, Independent Exams)	\$1,429,509	\$946,584	\$787,973	\$921,998
Proportion of Discretionary Costs to Total claims Costs	15%	12%	10%	10%
Subrogation Recoveries from 3 rd Parties & Excess Insurance	\$295,701	\$800,507	\$339,612	\$242,904
Customer Service Rankings	3.43	4.24	4.12	4.14

